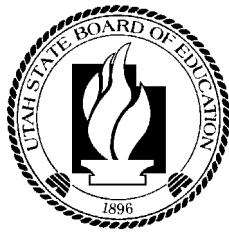


**Report of the
Accreditation Visiting Team**

**Turn-About Ranch School
280 North 300 East
Escalante, Utah 84726**

November 9, 2004



Utah State Office of Education
250 East 500 South
P.O. Box 144200
Salt Lake City, Utah 84114-4200

**THE REPORT OF THE
VISITING TEAM REVIEWING**

**Turn-About Ranch School
280 North 300 East
Escalante, Utah 84726**

November 9, 2004

UTAH STATE OFFICE OF EDUCATION

**Patti Harrington, Ed.D.
State Superintendent of Public Instruction**

**DIVISION OF
STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT AND SCHOOL SUCCESS**

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Salt Lake City, Utah

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FOREWORD

The major purpose of the accreditation process is to stimulate school growth and improvement so as to increase student achievement.

In these efforts, the school staff makes a comprehensive evaluation of the school's programs, operations, and results. The school determines how actual practices align to stated objectives and resulting outcomes. It is a three-phased evaluation: (1) self-evaluation, (2) on-site evaluation by an external team of educators, and (3) implementation using units of the evaluation to improve the school by effecting thoughtful change.

The evaluation, November 9, 2004, was conducted because of the school's desire to ensure quality education for all students in the school, and to increase student achievement.

The entire staff of Turn-About Ranch School is commended for the time and effort devoted to studying and evaluating the various facets of the total program and to preparing the materials used by the visiting team. The excellent leadership given by Principal Chris Christensen is also commended.

The staff and administration are congratulated for their desire for excellence at Turn-About Ranch School, and also for the professional attitude of all members of the group, which made it possible for them to see areas of weakness and strength and to suggest procedures for bringing about improvements.

While these recommendations may be used to solicit financial support to acquire some of the materials, equipment, and services needed to carry out a more effective program, it is even more important that the faculty and administration utilize them as they continue to evaluate and modify course offerings and administrative and classroom procedures to more dramatically increase student achievement at Turn-About Ranch School.

Patti Harrington, Ed.D.
State Superintendent
of Public Instruction

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TURN-ABOUT RANCH SCHOOL

ADMINISTRATION AND STAFF

School Administration

Max Stewart Executive Director
Chris Christensen Principal

Counseling

Chris Christensen School Counselor
David Neslen Pre-Licensed Therapist
Dayna Rust Pre-Licensed Therapist
Teresa Shinedling Clinical Director

Support Staff

Connie Allen	Lora Engberg	Jack Nelson
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Albery Cronin	Debbie Lyman	Erin Treanor
Christina Dearden	Kaira Nani	

Faculty

Jennifer Neslen	Anne Spencer	Karl Spencer
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MISSION STATEMENT

Empowering our students with traditional Christian values of honesty, openness, respect, teamwork, and accountability; in order to instill a positive, responsible, cooperative attitude and to prepare them for successfully living within their family, community, school, and society.

BELIEF STATEMENTS

At Turn-About Ranch, the administrators, teachers, staff and personnel believe that:

- Students' growth through learning is a chief priority of Turn-About Ranch.
- Education and lifelong learning provides economic, social, and emotional freedom.
- All teachers, counselors, staff, and parents work together to support student's multi-disciplined education.
- Teaching communication skills ensures the greatest potential for student success.
- Students will be actively involved in their own learning process in the areas of academics, personal values, and daily interpersonal relationships.

MEMBERS OF VISITING TEAM

Ralph P. Vander Heide, Ph.D., Utah State Office of Education Consultant in
School Accreditation, Chairperson

Joette Hayden, Educational Director, Triumph Youth Services

Judith H. Vander Heide, Consultant in School Accreditation

TURNABOUT RANCH

REPORT OF THE VISITING TEAM

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION DESCRIBING THE PURPOSE OF THE VISIT, THE SELF-IMPROVEMENT PLAN, CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL, AND OTHER RELEVANT INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

A team of three educators, the Visiting Team, visited Turn-About Ranch (one of several residential schools owned and managed by the Aspen Education Group) on November 9, 2004, to complete a site evaluation as part of the requirements for accreditation by the Northwest Association of Accredited Schools (NAAS) and the state of Utah.

The school has established beliefs and a mission statement, which are specific to the needs and desired learning outcomes at Turnabout Ranch (Turn-About Ranch). Faculty and constituents have decided upon three specific desired results for student learning (DRSLs). The school analyzed instructional and organizational effectiveness, and developed an action plan for achievement of the DRSLs. Plans are in place to implement the goals (complete with indicators of achievement) of the action plan and to document the results.

The school followed the guidelines of the National Study of School Evaluation guidebook, *School Improvement: Focusing on Student Performance* as well as the Utah guide, *Collaborating for Student Achievement*. The Visiting Team observes that Turn-About followed those guides in an exemplary fashion in its efforts to provide the “big picture” at the school. The director of the school participated in an in-service workshop on accreditation, which was held in Salt Lake City on October 6, 2004, and he has worked with the local school district to learn more about the Utah school accreditation process.

The school is located in the small rural community of Escalante, in southern Utah’s canyon country. The objective of Turn-About Ranch is to provide a “tough love,” high-impact residential program that will remold the lives of rebellious, troubled teenagers. The program objective is facilitated through the environment of an historic, real-life cow-and-horse ranch, and through the stressing of universally recognized values and morals including honesty, respect, teamwork, and accountability.

The dry, mild climate allows for year-round ranch chores, student-livestock interactions, horseback riding, hiking, and other outdoor activities. The horses at Turn-About Ranch play an essential role in the therapeutic process of helping youth and adolescents during

the program. Students learn life lessons while interacting with these animals that can be applied to their family, school, and peer relationships when they return home.

Students are admitted year-round. A minimum stay of 60 days is required, although most students stay an average of 90 days. Counselors and parents decide when the teenagers are ready to return home. Upon placement, parents fill out a basic profile on each student as to the reasons for placement. Upon analysis of this data, counselors are able to determine a basic profile of a student's needs. The school then uses this data to design an educational program that fits the needs of parents and students, and that is aligned with the school's mission and beliefs.

The parenting program is an essential element of the therapeutic process at Turn-About Ranch. When students arrive at the Ranch, a Primary Counselor (known as a "PC") is assigned to work with them. Weekly phone sessions from the Primary Counselor to the family allow the family to discuss issues and to be involved in the therapeutic process. Counselors can incorporate into their treatment plan any information the parents might give relating to past behavior. Family involvement in the therapeutic process helps parents by giving them tools to support their child as he or she begins to change negative habits. The goal of the parent program is to assist parents in developing skills to handle their troubled teenager.

Turn-About Ranch was established with the idea that students needed intense therapy with an emphasis on behavior modification. There was no great emphasis on the educational component. However, seeking accreditation has been a direct result of efforts to better serve students by minimizing the classroom deficiencies they would otherwise suffer without gaining credit during their stay at Turn-About Ranch.

Many students at Turn-About Ranch have struggled in school – not because they are intellectually challenged, but because their behavioral and emotional problems have hampered their ability to focus on academics. With a healthier mind and body, their ability to focus on their education improves. Turn-About Ranch seeks to develop self-confidence and academic skills simultaneously because the educational component is an integral part of "turning the student around." A positive educational experience at Turn-About Ranch will improve students' ability to positively interact with teachers, improve their study skills, and reinforce their academic goals.

The school coordinates its academic efforts with students' home schools. Counselors/advisors are contacted to find out what the student's educational needs are, and an individual education plan is written for each student. Then Turn-About Ranch works in concert with the home school to determine how to best meet those needs.

Some schools send materials from the classes to which students will return upon completion of the Turn-About Ranch program, and Turn-About Ranch teachers help those students to keep up with the class work. Counselors encourage other students to get credit on their own, so they are enrolled in a BYU (or other college) independent study course, and then tutored as well. And finally, students can also gain certain credits from

Turn-About Ranch itself. Turn-About Ranch works with the home school counselors/advisors to integrate these credits into the student's graduation requirements.

The school's desired results for student learning (DRSLs) and self-improvement plan are aligned with the educational procedures outlined above.

The Visiting Team notes that the school enjoys full membership in the National Association of Therapeutic Schools and Programs, Inc.

CHAPTER 2

DESCRIPTION OF THE RESPONSE TEAM'S PERSPECTIVE AS TO THE WORK OF SCHOOL PERSONNEL IN ADDRESSING EACH ASPECT OF THE SELF-STUDY REPORT

The School Profile:

The profile of Turn-About Ranch portrays the school population, environment, curriculum, and other relevant information about the school, with emphasis on its mission, philosophy, and educational direction.

The school used survey instruments to gather data on the performance of the school in a systematic and well-managed way. The collection of data essentially provided a comprehensive description of the school and the "big picture" of its performance. Both limitations and strengths are indicated. The profile data is being used to guide the school improvement planning process.

The profile includes information mentioned in Chapter One above, as well as text and graphs on student demographics, school characteristics, student performance data, and stakeholder perspectives of the quality of education at Turn-About Ranch. The profile (appendix—see below) also includes information on the Aspen Education Group. The Visiting Team recommends that future self-studies include more information on the faculty (education level, degrees, teaching experience, etc.). Also, the Visiting Team observed that some of the information included in the appendix of the school's self-study report would be better placed in the profile.

Graphic overviews of the data have been developed that clearly portray the relationship among the various sets of data that have been collected for the profile. The graphs, charts, and narrative summaries provide useful information for school improvement planning, which will be ongoing.

As noted, the information has been disaggregated and used in developing action plans. The Visiting Team notes that the school could make a greater effort to complete follow-

up studies to learn about the post-Turn-About Ranch endeavors of students. Some follow-up studies have been done informally.

Mission and Belief Statements:

The mission and belief statements are meaningful and relevant to Turn-About Ranch.

Mission

The mission statement is concise and meaningful. However, the Visiting Team suggests that the stakeholders consider changing “Christian values of honesty...” to “universally (or another global term) recognized values of ...” since all cultures and religions belief in and teach the values listed in the statement.

Belief Statements

The school’s five beliefs were an outgrowth of the profiling. They are free of jargon and may be understood by the general public and all stakeholders. They express succinctly exactly what the school wants expressed. It appears that all stakeholders are willing to make a commitment to the direction indicated by these beliefs.

Desired Results for Student Learning (DRSLs):

The three DRSLs listed below are, as noted above, relevant to the goals of the educational program and consistent with the beliefs and mission.

Students should be able to:

1. Use effective communication skills.
2. Take responsibility for personal actions.
3. Be lifelong learners.

Each DRSL is listed in the action plan, complete with timelines, indications of needed resources, and persons responsible for overseeing attainment of the objectives. Procedures for evaluation and assessment are also indicated. It appears that all constituents “buy into” and understand the DRSLs. A consensus-building process was established for defining the results of student learning, and the learning needs of students were analyzed. The Visiting Team is very much aware of the fact that students attend Turn-About Ranch only 60 to 90 days, and that some learning needs are common while others are disparate. The school makes a noteworthy effort to meet those needs in a competent fashion.

Analysis of the Instructional and Organizational Effectiveness:

A holistic approach to instruction was evident, which included integrated values and lifelong learning skills, cross-curriculum instruction, and variety in teaching methodologies. Students indicated that teachers present and reinforce learning in different ways.

An analysis of the school's instructional and organizational effectiveness was conducted based on research, consultation with students' home schools, and some review of effective practices for teaching young persons who have behavioral problems. Data was collected that revealed both strengths and limitations. The school has defined goals for building and strengthening the capacity of Turn-About Ranch's instructional and organizational effectiveness.

Analysis of the Action Plan:

As already noted, the objectives of the school improvement plan(s) are well defined, and each has a functional timeline that is practical and achievable. Responsibilities have been assigned to various school personnel to carry out the steps of the action plans. The action plans are aligned with the profile, beliefs, mission, DRSLs, and the analysis of instructional and organizational effectiveness.

CHAPTER 3

THE SCHOOL'S ADHERENCE TO THE STANDARDS OF THE NORTHWEST ASSOCIATION OF ACCREDITED SCHOOLS, THE UTAH STATE CORE CURRICULUM, AND THE UTAH LIFE SKILLS

Turn-About Ranch, with some minor deviations, meets the eleven standards of the Northwest Association of Accredited Schools (NAAS). The school meets the requirements of the State Core Curriculum, and the seven Utah Life Skills appear to be included in the general teaching of life skills.

The Visiting Team commends the school principal for having nearly completed the requirements for a State of Utah license in school administration. He is already licensed as a school guidance counselor. The school is now in near compliance with NAAS Standard VIII.

The school needs to continue to work on Standard IV—Library Media in order to improve the selection of all reading materials and the availability of technology. The Visiting Team notes that several computers have recently been purchased. Their

installation awaits the completion of a computer lab. Then, too, a small library is being finished where expansion of the meager library holdings will occur. The school is also seeking a certified librarian to serve as a consultant.

CHAPTER 4

MAJOR COMMENDATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE VISITING TEAM

Commendations:

- The Visiting Team commends the entire staff, both academic and therapeutic, for offering cooperation and hospitality to the Visiting Team.
- The Visiting Team commends all constituents for “buying into” and understanding the self-improvement plan.
- The Visiting Team commends the administration and faculty for being very knowledgeable about the accreditation process and frank in their self-evaluation.
- The Visiting Team commends the administration and faculty for writing a perceptive and concise self-study.
- The Visiting Team commends the administration, therapists, and teachers for working together to integrate therapy and the psychological needs of students with the school’s academic element. Clearly, teachers and therapists work closely and well together.
- The Visiting Team commends the school for staying in close touch with parents/guardians.
- The Visiting Team commends the owners for providing adequate financial support, and for responding positively to reasonable requests by staff for educational materials that will improve teaching/learning.
- The Visiting Team commends the school for including in the curriculum an excellent equine program, which relates to both behavioral therapy and academics.
- The Visiting Team commends all staff members for their clear commitment to the young persons they are teaching.
- The Visiting Team commends the faculty for using the geology, archaeology,

flora, etc., of the area to augment and strengthen class work.

- The Visiting Team commends the administration and teachers for designing IEPs for each student.
- The Visiting Team commends the administration and owners for their commitment to strengthening the library and technology (primarily through the creation of a computer laboratory).

Recommendations:

- The Visiting Team recommends that the administration and faculty continue to review and evaluate the curriculum on a consistent basis.
- The Visiting Team recommends that the administration provide more in-service training in specific areas of perceived need.
- The Visiting Team recommends that the consulting librarian ensure that the collection is built and culled of all non-relevant and old materials, and that better use of computers and the Internet be assured as soon as the computer laboratory is completed.
- The Visiting Team recommends that stakeholders include in future self-studies all profile information in the Profile section of the report (not in the Appendix), as well as comprehensive information on staff members (degrees, years of experience, years at Turn-About Ranch, etc.). Furthermore, the inclusion of a greater variety of assessment data and information on how assessments (both summative and formative) are used would be helpful.
- The Visiting Team recommends that all stakeholders consider changing the term “Christian” in the mission statement, which may offend many non-Christians attending or considering attending this secular, private school.
- The Visiting Team recommends that the administration of the school and corporate administration work together to provide more in-service in accordance with perceived needs of the faculty.